

# Private James Peters.

4<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Border Regiment.

Service Number 3599656. POW Number 20132.

James Peters joined the Border Regiment as a Territorial on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1939 and served as a Private with the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion landed in Normandy, France on 19<sup>th</sup> September of that same year.

In May 1940 the Battalion became motorized and served as a Lines of Communication Battalion, and acted as support to the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division, 2<sup>nd</sup> Armoured Brigade, and the 51<sup>st</sup> Highland Division.

James Peters sustained a wound to his right hip by shrapnel from a trench mortar on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1940 in an engagement with Rommel's 7<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division at Fecampe in Normandy. Following this, along with two others, he spent the next few days evading capture. He was taken prisoner of war on 17<sup>th</sup> June when he was discovered hiding in a land drain on farmland on the outskirts of Etretat in Normandy. He then set out with thousands of others on the journey into captivity. It was along this journey that he collapsed due to his wound and then spent the next six weeks in a school at St Pol – sur – Ternoise, France, that was being used as a hospital. From here he again began on the journey through France, Belgium, and Holland and into Germany then on to Stalag XXA at Thorn (Torun) in Poland.

His time as a POW took him to a camp at Bromberg, then to a state farm in East Prussia, then returned to Stalag XXA. From Stalag XXA a group of Arbeitskommandos were taken to BAB 20 at Reigersfeld, Heydebreck, to work at the factories at Blechhammer.

Other POW's mentioned within the text.

Matthew Laidler. Fusilier. Northumberland Fusiliers.  
Service Number 4269242. POW Number 19141.

Thomas W. Hurrell. Gunner. Royal Artillery.  
Service Number 867338. POW Number 16309.  
The following is an extract from,

ARBEITSKOMMANDO 20132

The Memoirs of Private James Peters of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Border Regiment 1939 – 1945.  
Published 2017

Chapter 12  
Diary of a Death March

## **January 1945.**

It was on one day in January that planes came over in a very heavy snowstorm. This same day Berlin was bombed.

It was becoming very cold. We were now having more air raids, as the Russians were also bombing as well as the British and the Americans. We still did not have any Red Cross parcels coming through. One reason being, that the railway lines all over Germany were being destroyed, disrupting and stopping transport. The Polish and Czechoslovakian civilians used to tell us that the Russians were advancing fast and were getting nearer. We wondered as to how long it would be before they reached us. At this time we also knew that our forces had landed in France and had become established. We were also aware that the Germans were using long range flying bombs, and we were hearing accounts that they were developing jet engined aircraft. Our sergeants also passed news onto us that they had received on the radio that was hidden in the camp. We

wondered that if after all this time, would we be blown up.

We had been x- rayed two or three months earlier. Now the Germans started taking the lads away that had been found to have tuberculosis. They were working their way through the alphabet, and before they reached my initial we had set off on the march, and this meant that some of the lads went on the march suffering with tuberculosis.

*Note. The evacuation of the Blechhammer complex began on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January 1945. The Russian Army liberated Blechhammer on 26<sup>th</sup> January.*

*The prisoners of war set off marching not knowing where they were going or what intentions the Germans had in store for them.*

*During these closing months of the war, a number of German soldiers that these POWs met, spoke of Germany's might shrinking, and then suddenly rising again, and gaining victory. Others spoke of how Germany would join forces with the Western Allies and fight against Russia.*

*The following is the transcribed diary of James Peters. The original of which was written in pencil on a small note pad. It is a personal account of the time when prisoners of war, along with other factions held captive by the Germans in eastern Europe, were force marched westward away from the advancing Russian Army during the early months of 1945. These months were some of the coldest months on record for this region in the twentieth century.*

*The Death Marches of 1945 remain one of the darkest but relatively unknown horrors of the Second World War.*

#### **January. Monday 22nd**

We were in camp all day waiting to move off. The Russians are very close now. We could hear the Russian guns and planes all day. Advanced Russian tanks were reported to be about 3 kilometres away. We had orders to move off at 4pm. We left camp at Reigersfeld at 4.30pm. We left an issue of soup in the boilers. We were issued with 3 x 800 grams of bread and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a Red Cross parcel. About 1000 men in this column. We marched across the River Oder, which was about 3 kilometres from camp. We marched all through the night. Temperatures were around minus 25 degrees Celsius. It was knee deep in snow in many places. We got lost twice in the night. We were behind a column of Jews. We kept passing them lying in the road, dying of cold and malnutrition, and others having been shot by Schutzstaffel ( SS ) guards. They were a pitiful sight, and we could do nothing for them. We arrived at our destination at about 7am the next morning, and stayed on a farm at Gruinwreide. We had marched about 40 kilometres. The snow is deep on the ground.

#### **January. Tuesday 23rd and Wednesday 24th**

Stayed on farm at Gruinwreide. It is very cold. Minus 18 degrees Celsius. We made fires in the farm yard to cook on. Received 250 grams of brot and some margarine. I made a sledge from pieces of wood that were around the farm yard for my two mates and myself. Our boots are frozen stiff.

#### **January. Thursday 25th**

Left Gruinwreide, and marched 20 kilometres to Krominsdorf. We are still passing Jews dying by the roadside. They were groaning from the cold and hunger, they were a terrible sight. The SS had beaten some of them. They wore a very thin suite like pyjamas. Our lads had small carts, prams, and sledges to carry their kit on. The roads were frozen. We can hear the Russian guns. Passed road blocks. We arrived at about 1pm. Our feet are soaking wet and cold. We were billeted in a school house, after there having been some trouble about our billets. Not as cold. About minus 10 degrees Celsius.

### **January. Friday 26th**

Left Krominsdorf and marched 25 kilometres to Ludwigsdorf. We were still passing dying Jews. We saw one putting his blanket onto the snow to lie down and die on. He looked terrible. Arrived at about 1pm. We were put into barns. About 200 men in ours. Our brot and Red Cross are now finished. Very cold, minus 18 degrees Celsius.

### **January. Saturday 27th**

Left Ludwigsdorf and marched 30 kilometres to Harensdorf. It is very cold, minus 27 degrees Celsius. Our boots are frozen, and rubbing skin off our feet. Nothing to eat today.

### **January. Sunday 28th**

Nothing to eat yet. Left Harensdorf and marched 25 kilometres in a heavy snowstorm. Snowstorm making it uncomfortable. Too hungry to notice countryside. We came into the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. We could hear the guns. We passed plenty of road blocks. When passing through Neustadt, Russian planes attacked gun positions about 1 kilometre to our right. There was a dog fight. We were ready to dive off the road. We billeted in a guest house in Reichenstien. Still cold, minus 15 degrees Celsius. We received two mugs of burgu at night.

### **January. Monday 29th**

Stayed all day in the guest house. We received one mug of burgu twice during the day.

### **January. Tuesday 30th**

No food this morning. Left Reichenstien for Rugersdorf near Glatz. Marched 25 kilometres in a snowstorm. The Jewish column was sent another way. They are still dying. No food from the Germans. Billeted 80 men to a barn. We are very hungry. We picked the peas out of the straw to boil and eat. No bread for a week. Weather changed to thaw.

### **January. Wednesday 31st**

Stayed in barn. No food. All becoming weaker. Feeling bad. Very cold. Men have frostbite.

### **February. Thursday 1st**

Stayed in barn. Got two mugs of burgu during the day. No food. We are all hungry and weak, and cold.

### **February. Friday 2nd**

Nothing to eat in the morning. Marched 25 kilometres to Neiderstein in a snowstorm. Billeted in a barn. Received ½ mug of burgu. We are very cold and hungry and weak. Men have frostbite. Men are sick. Men are dying from exhaustion. No food.

### **February. Saturday 3rd**

Received ½ mug of burgu in morning. Marched 20 kilometres to Brounou. Received 4 boiled spuds to each man. The guards are becoming more vicious. We are hungry and tired. Can't get anything to eat. Men are falling sick. Men are dying.

### **February. Sunday 4th**

We are supposed to be waiting for something to eat. No food. Weather has improved. We marched 4 kilometres to Wiekersdorf. Arrived at about 4pm. Men still falling out by the roadside. Heard gun shots at the rear. Men being murdered. Billeted on a farm. 50 men to a barn.

### **February. Monday 5th**

Still on farm at Wiekersdorf. I am feeling ill. It is my stomach. We got one potato at mid day. We got one potato at night. Can hear Russian guns. They sound close.

### **February. Tuesday 6th**

Still on farm at Wiekersdorf. Can hear Russian guns, not far away. Still feeling ill. Diarrhoea and sickness. No food all day.

### **February. Wednesday 7th**

Still on farm. I am still feeling ill. Received 300 grams of bread. Can clearly hear the sound of both the German and Russian guns. Received one mug of soup. This is Sudetenland. People no good.

### **February. Thursday 8th**

No food in morning. Marched 24 kilometres to Mekelsdorf. Received  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of soup. Can still hear Russian guns.

### **February. Friday 9th**

No food in morning. Marched 12 kilometres to Abbersdorf. Received one mug of soup. Can still hear the Russian guns.

### **February. Saturday 10th**

Stayed in Abbersdorf all day. Received 3 boiled potatoes in morning. Everybody very hungry. Received one mug of soup. Still very cold. Well below zero.

### **February. Sunday 11th**

Left Abbersdorf at 5am. Marched 25 kilometres to Pilnikau. The guards are getting vicious, using their rifle butts to strike the men. We received 3 boiled potatoes and a mug of soup. Some sergeants and cooks set bad examples. They can't expect respect to be shown to them. Three Russian POWs shot for looking for bread.

### **February. Monday 12th**

No food in morning. Left Pilnikau at 7am. Marched 25 kilometres to Tchieste. Started march in a heavy snowstorm. It was terrible. Men collapsing. We crossed the Sudetenland – Czechoslovakian border at about noon. The Czech civilians were waiting for us. They threw food to us, bread, buns, spuds, apples etc. Some of our chaps behaved like pigs. A corporal went on his knees and dragged a woman down with him because she had food in her basket, and he wanted it all. Lots of others behaved the same way, showing themselves up. We arrived on a farm. Billeted 50 men to a barn. We had gathered plenty of food from the civilians. No food from the Germans. Air raid at night.

### **February. Tuesday 13th**

Left Tchieste at 7am. Marched 25 kilometres to Radim. It was raining heavily when we set off. It continued for 1½ hours. Civilians were still throwing us food when we were passing through towns and villages. Lots of chaps behaved like animals. We marched into an air raid. One plane crashed about 6 kilometres behind us, and burned. Two or three crew were seen to bail out. We could hear the guns and bombing. We had plenty of food when we arrived at Radim. We were wet through. Billeted 50 men to a barn. Air alarm and bombing nearby all night. We went out at night, dodged the guards, and visited the civilians. We were given a meal. We asked them about joining the Partisans. They told us that they did not want us, as it would be too difficult to hide us, and besides the war would not last much longer. After which we returned to the billet wet through, as it was knee deep in slush.

### **February. Wednesday 14th**

Stayed at Radim for the day. Eating the food that we had got from the civilians. Again dodged the guards, and visited civilians. Again they gave us a meal. Air raid nearby for most of the day.

### **February. Thursday 15th**

Stayed another day at Radim. The Czechoslovakians are very good to us. One chap fell into

the latrine. Looked a mess. Very sorry for him. Air raid.

### **February. Friday 16th**

Left Radim. Marched 20 kilometres. Got plenty of food off the civilians in the towns. We stayed 12 kilometres from Jitcheu at the Burgermasters farm. A good billet. Plenty to eat from what the civilians had given us.

### **February. Saturday 17th**

Marched 16 kilometres to Bosin. Plenty of soup and bread from the civilians. No food from the Germans. Dodged the guards and went out at night and visited civilians. A good billet 100 men to a barn.

### **February. Sunday 18th**

Stayed at Bosin all day. Eating the food that the civilians had given us. Some lads went out at night to visit the civilians. They were caught as the dogs were set on them. They were beaten up by the guards, then they were shot. We were lucky, we had decided not to go out.

### **February. Monday 19th**

Left Bosin. Marched 20 kilometres out of Czechoslovakia and back into Sudetenland, to Hohnerwasser. Got soup at 10.30pm. One man in the column got shot trying to escape. He was not killed. We could hear the Russian guns. Again the regimental sergeant majors and the sergeants show themselves as not fit to be in charge of the men. My mate Tom Hurrell fell sick. I never saw him again.

### **February. Tuesday 20th**

Left Hohnerwasser. No food to start with. Marched 15 kilometres to Reichenstadt. We could hear the Russian guns all the way. Received one cup of watery soup for the day.

### **February. Wednesday 21st**

Left Reichenstadt. No food to start with. Marched 15 kilometres to Gleichstadt. We are feeling tired and hungry. We got 2/3rds of a German loaf and a mug of soup. We are very tired and wet. Men are getting sick and dying.

### **February. Thursday 22nd**

No food, only what was left of the bread from yesterday, which in the majority of cases chaps had eaten. We left Gleichstadt and marched 45 kilometres to Gros Priesoner on the River Elbe. We were marched around the streets looking for billets. We ended up being billeted in a school. No food today, as the ration cart had broken down. Again the NCO's prove themselves unfit to lead men. Air alarm.

### **February. Friday 23rd**

Left Gros Priesoner. No food to start with. Marched 15 kilometres to Ausaig. Marched through two air alarms. Received two mugs of soup. Billeted in a barn. 50 men in barn. Weather mild.

### **February. Saturday 24th**

Left Ausaig. No food to start with. Marched 15 kilometres to Graupen. Marched through snow blizzard. Billeted in a barn. 80 men in barn. Received one cup of soup. 15 men have to share one loaf. Weather wet. Air raid nearby. We could hear bombing and ack ack.

### **February. Sunday 25th**

Stayed in barn at Graupen. Received one mug of soup. 28 men have to share one loaf. 8 men to share one Red Cross parcel. Air raid nearby.

### **February. Monday 26th**

Left Graupen. No food to start with. Marched 20 kilometres to Osaegg. Marched through a gale and heavy rain. Billeted in a school. We are cold and wet through. Received one mug of soup.

### **February. Tuesday 27th**

Left Osaegg. No food to start with. Marched 25 kilometres to Harreth. Passed through heavily bombed areas of Bruda and Brus. Air raid when in middle of the area. We were all very worried. Billeted on a farm. 50 men to a barn. Air raid still on. The local population have gone to the air raid shelters. We are very tired and hungry. We received 3 boiled potatoes. Weather good.

### **February. Wednesday 28th**

Stayed in barn all day. We received 3 boiled potatoes in the morning. We are considering refusing to move unless we get some food. Futile as they will probably shoot some of us. I am very sick, and feeling very weak through lack of food. We are all very sick. Weather bad. It has been a terrible five weeks and still not finished. Every day there are fewer of us. We wonder what the Germans intend to do with us. Living off hope.

### **March. Thursday 1st**

Left Harreth. No food to start with. Marched 36 kilometres to Milaouc. It was very hard work. Many men are falling out sick, and dying. Some are being shot. They just can't go on. Billeted in a barn. 100 men in the barn. Received raw potatoes and soup at night. Weather good. Had air alarm.

### **March. Friday 2nd**

Left Milaouc. No food to start with. Marched 16 kilometres in a snowstorm to Gorslen. Air raid. Hundreds of planes. Lasted 3 hours. Received one cup of soup, and 2/5 ths of a loaf, which has to last three days. We are wet and very cold. Weather has changed to very cold.

### **March. Saturday 3rd**

Left Gorslen. No food to start with. Marched 30 kilometres to Leichenstadt. Marched through a snow blizzard. Snow on the ground all the way. Air raid. Received one cup of soup. 15 men to a loaf.

### **March. Sunday 4th**

Stayed at Leichenstadt all day. Received one cup of soup. 6 men to a loaf, which has to last for three days. Everyone sick, very tired, and very hungry.

### **March. Monday 5th**

Left Leichenstadt. No food to start with. Marched 25 kilometres to unknown. Received 2 boiled potatoes. Air raid. Saw large numbers of American planes.

### **March. Tuesday 6th**

Left unknown. No food to start with. Marched 25 kilometres to Konigsburg. Marched through snowstorm. Billeted in a barn. We are wet through and very cold. Received one cup of soup

### **March. Wednesday 7th**

Stayed in barn all day. Received one mug of soup. 7 men to a loaf. Air alarm. Feeling sick and weak.

### **March. Thursday 8th**

Stayed in barn all day. Received one mug of soup at 5pm. Feeling bad.

### **March. Friday 9th**

Stayed in barn all day. One man shot for doing nothing. All feeling ill. Men are dying.

### **March. Saturday 10th**

Received half a Red Cross parcel and a ¼ loaf per man. The sergeants and RSM's took more than the men. Again they show they are not fit to keep their positions. They treat us as if we were dogs. Left Konigsburg. Marched 20 kilometres to Zittersdorf. We passed through Egeb, which had been heavily bombed. Received one cup of soup. I am feeling pretty run down, but will try and stick it out. We are in Bavaria.

### **March. Sunday 11th**

Stayed at Zittersdorf all day. Received one cup of soup.

### **March. Monday 12th**

Stayed at Zittersdorf all day. No food all day. The half Red Cross parcel is now finished. We are feeling pretty rough now. It is hard work to keep going. Many men are dying.

### **March. Tuesday 13th**

Left Zittersdorf. No food to start with. Marched 15 kilometres to unknown. Air raid on. We can hear planes and guns. Received one cup of soup and 375 grams of bread, which has to last three days.

### **March. Wednesday 14th**

Left unknown No food to start with. Marched 15 kilometres to Rauchensteig. Received one cup of soup. Air alarm during the night. Heavy formations of planes passed over.

### **March. Thursday 15th**

Stayed in Rauchensteig all day. Air alarm. We could hear planes going over. Received one cup of soup and 375 grams of bread.

### **March. Friday 16th**

Left Rauchensteig. No food to start with. Marched 15 kilometres to Rauchenstadt. Air alarm. Received one cup of soup. Weather good. Men going sick. Men dying. I am feeling very weak and sick.

### **March. Saturday 17th**

Left Rauchenstadt. No food to start with. Marched 10 kilometres to Gefrees. Marched through rain showers. Air alarm. We could hear planes overhead. We are wet and uncomfortable. Received one cup of soup.

### **March. Sunday 18th**

Left Gefrees. No food to start with. Marched 20 kilometres to Ramsdetell. Billeted 70 men to a barn. Received one cup of soup. We are very hungry. Air alarm in the night. Weather good.

### **March. Monday 19th**

Stayed in barn all day. Everyone very hungry and feeling down in the dumps. Air alarm. Planes pass overhead in large waves. Weather good. Received one mug of soup.

### **March. Tuesday 20th**

Stayed in barn all day. Issued with bread. Was not fit to eat as it was full of green mould. Everyone cursing and hungry. Received one mug of soup. Air alarm in the night. Could hear bombing very near. Weather good.

### **March. Wednesday 21st**

Stayed in barn all day. Received one cup of soup. It is a long wait for the next lot of food. I am hungry and feeling weak. There seems to be only hope to live on now. Men are coming from

upstairs in the barn to sleep downstairs as they are too weak to climb the stairs. Weather good. We have been told we are waiting for train transport. May not be a good thing. Easy targets for aircraft.

#### **March. Thursday 22nd**

Stayed in barn all day. We are very hungry and weak. We are more cheerful at noon, as we hear that Red Cross parcels are expected. Air alarm. Could hear planes overhead. Weather good. Received one mug of soup at 5pm. My stomach is bad.

#### **March. Friday 23rd**

Stayed in barn all day. Received one Red Cross parcel per man. It has certainly saved our lives. Also one cup of soup and half a loaf. Air alarms all day. Saw planes.

#### **March. Saturday 24th**

Still in Ramsdetell. Stayed in barn all day. Received one cup of soup. Air alarms. Weather good. I have still got a bad stomach.

#### **March. Sunday 25th**

Had check parade. Received one cup of soup and a sugar and cheese issue, and half a loaf. Air alarm all day. Saw plenty of USA planes. My stomach is still bad.

#### **March. Monday 26th**

I have been ill for three or four days now. It is a pretty rough feeling. Air alarms all day. Planes overhead. Weather dull. One man fell into the latrine. Made a mess of himself. All felt sorry for him. No food today.

#### **March. Tuesday 27th**

Still in Ramsdetell. Stayed in barn all day. Still feeling ill. No air alarms. Received one cup of soup. Weather dull.

#### **March. Wednesday 28th**

Still in Ramsdetell. Stayed in barn all day. Air alarms all day. Planes overhead. Weather dull. Had to use more of Red Cross parcel, not much left. My stomach is no better.

#### **March. Thursday 29th**

Stayed in barn all day. Red Cross parcel used up. Received a German loaf which has to last three days, and an issue of sugar and cheese. No soup. Weather dull.

#### **March. Friday 30th**

Still in Ramsdetell. Received one cup of soup. We are getting hungry again.

#### **March. Saturday 31<sup>st</sup>**

Still in Ramsdetell. Stayed in barn all day. Received half a Red Cross parcel per man. Air alarms. Planes overhead. Received one cup of soup.

#### **April. Sunday 1st**

Still in Ramsdetell. Stayed in barn all day. Received 300 grams of bread and one cup of soup. I am feeling a lot better now.

#### **April. Monday 2nd**

Still in Ramsdetell. Received one sixth of a German loaf. Air alarms all day. We made a blower to cook on. Received one cup of soup.

*Note. A blower is a cooking device contrived from tin cans.*



### **April. Tuesday 3rd**

Still in Ramsdetell. Received one cup of soup. Air alarm. Bombing nearby. Still feeling better.

### **April. Wednesday 4th**

Still in Ramsdetell. Received one sixth of a German loaf and a cup of soup. Air alarms all night.

### **April. Thursday 5th**

Still in Ramsdetell. Received one fifth of a German loaf and one cup of soup. Air alarms all night and day. Plane just dropped some bombs about 1 kilometre away. Through the windows of the barn, I can see planes bombing Bayreuth, which is about 5 kilometers away. Planes came over and machine gunned just outside the Dorf ( *Village* ) and wrecked a train. We got in between two walls for cover. Received half a Red Cross parcel per man.

### **April. Friday 6th**

Still in Ramsdetell. Received one cup of soup. It is a good job we had the half Red Cross parcel yesterday or we would be in a very bad way.

### **April. Saturday 7th**

Still in Ramsdetell. Received one cup of soup. Air alarms all day. Planes dropped bombs on to the next village about 1 kilometre away. I am watching through the barn window, I can see planes diving on a nearby aerodrome, and machine gunning. It is a marvellous sight. We are all feeling a bit worried, but we realize the front is getting closer.

### **April. Sunday 8th**

Still in Ramsdetell. Received 250 grams of bread. We were taken to work on the Railway Station at Bayreuth about 5 kilometres from the barn. Bayreuth had been bombed. We arrived during an air raid, and were put to work repairing rails. Bayreuth was burning well. We returned to the farm at about 8pm. Received one cup of soup. Another air raid, but we were too tired to bother. Our Red Cross parcels are finished.

*Note. Bayreuth is a sizeable town sited on the Roter Main River. in Northern Bavaria, Germany. With heavy air strikes taking place on the 5<sup>th</sup> , 8<sup>th</sup> , and 11<sup>th</sup> April, approximately a third of the town was destroyed.*

### **April. Monday 9th**

Taken to Bayreuth again at 4am, with no food. Had two air raids. Planes machine gunned all around us. We had to continue working throughout. The Germans kept their machine guns on us to make sure we carried on working. Finished work at 1pm. Got back to the farm at about 4pm. Received one cup of soup and 500 grams of brot.

### **April. Tuesday 10th**

Got up at 2.30am. Started work in Bayreuth at 6am. Air alarms whilst we were working. Planes were over all day. They machine gunned all around us. We had to continue working throughout. The Germans kept their machine guns on us to make sure we carried on working. One or two dog fights overhead. We finished work at about 12 noon and returned to the farm at about 3pm. Received one cup of soup and 500 grams of brot. Air alarm during the night. Hundreds of planes passed overhead.

### **April. Wednesday 11th**

Reveille at 2.30am. Started work in Bayreuth at 6am. We took our kit with us to go to another billet near Bayreuth. A panzer alarm ( *Tank alarm* ) first, then air alarm. Planes machine gunned all around us. We are going to be nervous wrecks before long. These air raids last for hours. The all clear sounded, we returned to work. The air alarm went again. The German Feldgendarmarie Sergeant, would not let us go to the woods or the fields. He made us stay in the streets of Bayreuth. We were on the streets when the planes dropped their markers. Some chaps went

under houses and under the railway. I ran to get out of town, and ran through the bombing. Bombs dropped within 50 yards of three of us. We took shelter under a thin bridge. The planes bombed heavily within 200 yards of our position, it was good bombing. There was a bit of a lull, so we dashed for the fields. We watched the bombing and machine gunning from the fields. We saw one of our chaps get shot by the Volkstrum ( *German Home Guard* ) in a field during the raid. The raid lasted about four hours. We returned to town. All my kit had been blown up. We found our new billets. We had a roll call and found that 106 men were missing, killed and wounded. Of those killed, the greater number of them had been killed whilst sheltering under the railway bridge. Here again the sergeants and RSM's were shown up for what they were.

#### **April. Thursday 12th**

We were billeted in a brick kiln in Bayreuth. We did not go to work. Air alarms all day. Planes machine gunned the aerodrome and the main road near our billets. We were diving about all day, from cover to cover. Our RSM in charge of the column went mad and had a fit. The RAF strafed the roads again in the afternoon and killed two horses just outside the billet. We made sure we all got a piece of horse meat to eat. We have been eating horse meat for years when given the chance. We received three tins of soup to last three days. Two men were buried. The one who had been shot by the Volkstrum and one who had been killed in the raid. The wounded were attended to by the Wehrmacht.

#### **April. Friday 13th**

Started on march at 3am. Marched through Bayreuth. Plenty of fires in Bayreuth, it looked in a pretty bad mess. We marched 30 kilometres to unknown. We could hear the American guns. The Germans are looking worried. No food today.

#### **April. Saturday 14th**

Left unknown. Marched 25 kilometres at night to unknown. Can still hear the guns at Bayreuth. Planes passed overhead on their way to bomb. They bombed nearby. No food today.

*Note. On 14<sup>th</sup> April, the US 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, commanded by General George S Patton, captured Bayreuth.*

#### **April. Sunday 15th**

Left unknown. Marched 15 kilometres at night. Arrived unknown. Billeted in a barn. Stayed in the barn during the day. The sound of the bombing and the guns is still close. Weather good. No food today.

#### **April. Monday 16th**

Left the barn at unknown. Marched 15 kilometres at night. Arrived at unknown. Billeted in a barn. 50 men in the barn. Planes machine gunned on the road nearby, and the next village. We are feeling pretty well done up. Heavy formations of aircraft passed over at night. Weather good. No food today.

#### **April. Tuesday 17th**

We are about 10 kilometres from Wieden. No march today. Stayed in barn all day. Received one Red Cross parcel per man. So again the Red Cross saved our lives. We could eat a parcel in one meal, we are that hungry. We received two mugs of soup. Marched off at 10pm. Marched 30 kilometres.

#### **April. Wednesday 18th**

Marched through the night. Heavy bombing all around us during the night. We passed a German convoy at about 6.30am making for the woods. About a hour later they were blown up by the RAF. The RAF had no opposition. Haven't seen a German plane for a week or so now. Arrived at unknown at about 8am. Poor billet. Received one mug of soup. Weather good. Planes over, machine gunning all the roads. No traffic can move during the day.

### **April. Thursday 19<sup>th</sup>**

We marched 15 kilometres in the early morning. Sixteen spitfires came and had a look at us when on the march. They recognized us, what a relief. We waved at them, and they waved back, and circled us. They machine gunned just in front of our column to stop it. We stopped and opened up to disclose three German trucks on the road. The planes dived and machine gunned the trucks and burned them out. They then circled and waved, then flew off. It was a marvellous piece of work. We enjoyed it. We arrived at Winklarn, Bavaria, at about 10am. Poor billets. 100 men to a barn. Received one cup of soup. Weather good.

*Note. Winklarn lies in Upper Palatinate in the district of Schwandorf, Bavaria, Germany.*

### **April. Friday 20th**

No march today. Hundreds of bombers passed over and bombed Wieden. Received one cup of soup. We lit fires outside to cook our Red Cross parcel contents on.

### **April. Saturday 21st**

No march today. The guards are becoming more vicious. They are kicking our fires out. Weather good. No food today.

### **April. Sunday 22nd**

No march today. Fighter planes and bombers about overhead all day. They are machine gunning the roads nearby. German infantry and artillery pass through the village. The Germans are retreating fast. A great sight. We expect to be moving soon with this retreat taking place. No food today.

### **April. Monday 23rd**

Guards came in raising us out with their rifle butts, for us to get marching. We got outside and heard the sound of the guns quite close. We took our time. Then we heard machine guns very close. We dispersed. My mate Matty Laidler and I made a break for it, and left the German guards, and went into a barn. Then from there into a cellar under the road, and waited for the Yanks. We heard guns around the village, and then the Germans put up the white flag and surrendered. The Yanks entered the village at 11am. We went to a house, took some food and had a feed. It was grand to see the Yanks in their tanks. They gave us some of their rations and were real decent to us. Some of our lads went mad, riding horses, bicycles, motor cycles, and driving cars. Others took it quietly. The Yanks shot a German guard with a tank shell as he was running away across a field. There was nothing left of him. They offered to give us guns to shoot the other guards. We all refused the offer. Lots of German prisoners kept coming in. We got a horse and gave it to the chap on our farm for food. We were billeted in the farm house, ten men to a room. We took our clothes off for the first time in three months. Some of the chaps clothing had disintegrated. Approximately 1000 of us had set off on the march from Reigersfeld on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, and less than 200 of us have reached Winklarn. We have marched over 500 miles.

### **April. Tuesday 24th**

I went out and killed three hens. We had them for dinner. We are in the front line now, and are waiting for the Yankee infantry to come up with rations and transport. There is rifle fire around the village. The village is full of English and Russian POWs

### **April. Wednesday 25th**

We set off to walk to Kam. We had gone about 6 kilometres when we were turned back to the village of Winklarn to wait for rations and transport. We killed some more hens and had them for tea. At night we went to a nearby village foraging, and got lots of food. Yankee infantry start coming up. Artillery shelling the next village. Some of our chaps went to the German guards and hammered them, and took their boots and belts etc, off them.

#### **April. Thursday 26th**

We travelled to Nuremburg in trucks. Fifty five men to a truck. Taken to the Airport. Nuremburg in a terrible state. Got de loused and billeted in tents.

#### **April. Friday 27th**

Yanks gave us good food. Waiting for planes. Informed that the weather is too rough for flying.

#### **April. Saturday 28th**

Left Nuremburg at 3pm by Dakota. It was a rough trip. The pilot said it was his roughest yet. It certainly was mine. We arrived in Brussels at about 6pm. We stayed in Hostel Number 9, House 182, Rue de Loy.

#### **April. Sunday 29th**

Waiting in Brussels for a plane. Weather too rough.

#### **April. Monday 30th**

Weather too rough for planes. We left Brussels by train at 6.15pm. Arrived in Ostende at 9pm. Billeted in a barracks in Ostend.

#### **May. Tuesday 1st**

Air alarm in Ostend. We left for England at 6pm on a boat called Ben My Chree. Which is Manx for 'Girl of My Heart.' *Before the war it had been a passenger ferry operated by the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company.* It was pretty rough. I fed the fishes all the way. We arrived at Tilbury at 1.30am. Back in England. When they weighed me I was seven stone. I had made it back. Hundreds of chaps have perished. Lost a lot of good mates, who had made it through the camps, but missed making it through that last journey. It was only the Red Cross, and never giving up hope that had kept me alive. If anyone is ever to tell me to "Go to hell." I will be able to look them straight in the eye and say, "I have already been."